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ABSTRACT

A six-week course titled "You Too Can Return to College" at the University of California at Davis is designed to assist adult women reentering college. Returning women were found to be lacking in confidence, had low self-expectations, and needed specialized counseling. The reassessment course is offered through the Extension Division of the university, with the campus Learning Assistance Center participating in a supportive role. Course activities include: group sharing, interest/aptitude testing, writing a life diary, role perception, study skills, test interpretation, career opportunities, interviewing and resume information, discussion of opportunities for academic experience, and a concluding personal interview. Several aspects of the program in which the Learning Assistance Center can be especially helpful to the reentering woman involve time management geared to the student/wife/mother role, tips on note taking and improving verbal skills, and the availability of informally structured support groups. Learning assistance centers can be a valuable component in programs for reentry women by assisting in recovering skills for effective learning. (EA)

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Re-entry Women; Some Programmatic Considerations

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Learning Assistance Centers can make valuable contributions to campus programs for women. By participating in a re-assessment class held through the University Extension at Davis, the staff at the Learning Assistance Center at the University of California at Davis has created some programs which facilitate the Learning process for the re-entering woman. Special consideration must be made for the multi-role student who is also wife, mother, or single parent.

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The Chronicle of Higher Education in its December 23rd, 1974 issue has described aptly the situation faced by great numbers of re-entry women. "As they came to the campuses, the mature women found that colleges and universities had few if any arrangements to meet their particular needs. Required courses were held at impossible times. Review classes in special fields were not existant and the personal and academic problems that evolved from combining family responsibilities, college and re-entry into the job market, were foreign to counselors who spent their time advising young people."

Yet the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor listed 376 institutions nationwide with special programs for adult women in 1971. Since that time some of the programs have folded while still others have come into existance. One such new program originated at the University of California at Davis where an awareness exists for the needs of women who re-enter. Jeanne Smith who designed the special class described the returning women she has seen as having "lack of confidence, low self-expectation and a need for specialized

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counseling."

As Jeanne Smith, Counselor with the Division of Extended Learning, and I worked together in her program it became clear, too, that the recovery of skills attendant to academic success became a major factor in improving self-concept and self-expectation, particularly as they relate to the learning process. What evolved was a synergistic effort on the part of the Learning Assistance Center with the Counseling Center, University Extension and the division of extended Learning Part Time Degree Program.

The following presentation, then, is a description of a reassessment course given through the Extension Division of the University of California at Davis and the way in which the campus Learning Assistance Center participates in a supportive effort to facilitate re-entry for women into the higher educatory process.

Course Description

Running for six weeks, the course titled "You Too Can Return to College," covers the following sequence:

1. Introductions and group sharing, consideration of personal factors and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory is administered. The class is also asked to write a life diary.

2. The SCAT is administered and the diaries are discussed in diads -- participants list ten roles which they perform. They are asked to prioritize roles. The dynamics of family structure and significant "other" roles are discussed. The realities of "pressured student" immerge.

3. Participants receive SCAT results and the remainder of the time is spent in a study skills presentation by a member of the staff of the Learning Assistance Center. (In this case, myself.) Special emphasis is placed on time scheduling and the necessity for 'space', listening, note-taking and reading skill also receive attention.

4. The fourth session includes a discussion of the SVIB - SCII results and the group is asked to fantasize the perfect job. A counselor who specializes in vocational testing presents this material.

5. Career Opportunities are presented as well as interviewing and resumé information. Placement Center Staff

6. Discussion of opportunities at three levels: Junior College, State Colleges, and University of California for the next step -- the academic experience.

The course is finalized with a personal interview with Jeanne Smith; several alternatives are discussed, and an option is left open to begin to test these alternatives when the woman is ready.

Where, you might ask, does a Learning Assistance Center fit into such a program beyond the minimal participation just mentioned? There are several areas in which Learning Assistance Center personnel possess the skills and material to be extremely helpful to the re-entering woman.

Time Management

The area of time management takes on quite a different dimension when the student involved is also a wife and mother. Here, not only must time as a quantitative entity be considered, but also the qualita-

tive aspects of time given to family must receive a specific kind of consideration. It is one thing for a single, young, full time student to allot time intelligently for studies and relationships; but for a woman who has had very little experience in setting aside time for herself, her needs and her goals are quite another. In looking at a viable time schedule, the Learning Assistance Center's personnel can be most helpful in understanding and encouraging the re-entry student to allot time for herself (in some cases a kind of permission is sought) and the time schedule offers the format for allowing a woman time for herself and her goals. When time is planned for family activities on a more specific continuum, those activities become much more qualitative, thereby relieving the guilt feelings with which the re-entry woman usually deals. There are many routine activities that must continue for most women. Dentist and doctors' appointments, usually a drag, can be utilized as festive time together.

The evaluation of one's study space often raises some pointed questions; where in most households does wife and mother have any space that is just hers? Dad may have his den, study, or work bench area and there is the hallowed family room, but mom has none of these. One woman responded that her space was a three foot square around the stove; a space not conducive to neat papers certainly. By stressing the need for a space which is set aside only for study, the Learning Assistance Center person can encourage and reinforce not only good study environments, but can aid in the development of selfhood, and a positive self concept so often in arrears in the re-entering woman.

Note Taking

Take into account declining audio-visual activity when discussing the lecture -- note taking process. It's helpful to put the student in touch with her listening dynamic. Often mothers have developed the habit of tuning out noise, kids, boring neighbors, etc. Most of such listening behavior has become unconscious, yet when confronted by a course which is dull, delivered with intonations reminiscent of the Latin Mass, some women may unconsciously respond with the tune-out only to realize at some point in a course that they are not getting the maim concepts. Some reminders on the business of attending are helpful here -- particularly in relation to sitting close to the lecturer and developing a consistency in seating in the large lecture hall for purposes of learning association during later testing.

It is helpful, too, to encourage a 'must do' list as differentiated from a 'should do' list. Establishing priorities takes a new dimensions when student - wife - mother can write a smashing paper while looking right at a stack of dirty dishes.

Test Taking and Verbal Skills

"No one was born knowing how to take tests. Although intelligence is probably hereditary, grade averages are not. Test taking is a skill that can be learned by anyone." (Norman 2:254)

It is with this philosophy (Perhaps tenent would be a more appropriate word) that the study skills section in the re-assessment

course has a particular meaning. As those SCAT scores come back and the student has to deal with some of the disappointment in facing some lacks in skills, it is essential that the techniques for improving verbal and math skills be introduced and emphasized. While not all Learning Assistance Centers have math programs available, (we do, with the auto-tutor which has programs in algebra, trigonometry, chemistry; we also utilize programmed math texts) most reading labs are well equipped with material that will aid the re-entering student in improving verbal skills. Vocabulary programs for improving socres on the SCAT, as with most standardized tests, go along with improving reading rates and comprehension. However, the sub-tests of the SCAT are relatively unspeeded, allowing completion for almost any student. The important aspect, then, for aiding in developed verbal abilities is intensive vocabulary work, dealing with words in context, reading for main ideas and discovering inferential intent in material.

SRA IVA has reading levels from grades nine through twelve and the vocabulary building sections contain the fundamentals of developing verbal dexterity while the McGraw Hill study type reading kit focuses on careful comprehension.

Support Group

A final aspect of the program which deserves mention is the support group which begins each academic term. This group is an informally structured one that meets at noon in numbers which vary from ten to thirty women throughout the quarter. In one six week period I met with the group to give a detailed workshop on study skills.

This past quarter I have again directly participated as a co-leader with Jeanne Smith discussing communication, time management and the delicate balance of family relationships as mom goes back to college.

In summary, Learning Assistance Centers can be a valuable component in programs for re-entry women. Most centers contain the staff and the materials, which when used in conjunction with creative programming can provide the means for recovering skills for effective learning. Such a contribution has direct bearing on the relationship between self concept and the learning process, thereby enriching academic experience for the returning woman.

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